



Technology with HEART

The HEART (Housing, Entrepreneurship and Readiness Training) Program's mission is to create new opportunities for low-income adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Houston to achieve their employment potential and, ultimately, to live independently. And, by developing an app, HEART is one tap closer to achieving its mission.

The HEART Program operates and maintains over 70 vending machines throughout the Houston area. People with IDD who participate in HEART receive the guidance and training necessary to work the vending machines, which includes maintaining product inventory, restocking the machines, and collecting and counting the cash deposited into the machines.

However, despite the training HEART provides, some people with IDD may require individualized support to increase their employability and prepare them for a career. Take Adrienne, for example. While participating in HEART, Adrienne has become very good at monitoring vending machines inventories, but her ability to write and record the inventories was limited.

To address this issue, which affected many people in the program, HEART teamed-up with Houston-based technology firm Blue Lance Group. With funding from the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, HEART and the Blue Lance Group developed an iPad application for recording inventories. The app is very visual, easy to use, and it allows users to customize it to fit their needs. Also, with the app, HEART can monitor inventories electronically rather than manually, therefore removing the need to maintain paper forms in countless binders.

Adrienne has been using the app and it has made a big difference for her. Adrienne can now record inventories and report totals by tapping a screen instead of filling out forms. In addition, since she can customize the app to suit her needs, she can activate different features, like the ability to add photos of products to help her ensure she restocks items correctly.

And, as Adrienne has become more effective at work, she has gained confidence in other areas of her life and become a leader.

“Adrienne has blossomed from a quiet and shy young woman to someone who advocates for herself and has even given speeches about her job,” said Dr. Ross Castillo, the director of programs for HEART. “By working with HEART, Adrienne has not only improved her employability and increased her income, but she has also become a more independent person.”

To learn more about The HEART Program, visit heartprogram.org.

This article was submitted by TCDD to the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities (GCPD) for GCPD’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) email campaign. During NDEAM, GCPD shared articles submitted by guest authors from around Texas.